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REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA, 1976-1985

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EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE: These, along with the subthemes of employment, health and education, are the goals of the United Nations Decade for Women, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, in its Resolution 3010(XXVII) of 18 December 1972. To achieve these goals, governments, non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations system had at hand the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year adopted in Mexico in 1975. The Plan of Action represents a broad consensus of what is needed to be done to bring women, wherever they may be, into the mainstream of development. It indicates what the world community, meeting in Mexico, considered as some of the major priority areas as regards the situation of women.

One year prior to the meeting in Mexico, African governments had adopted their Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development in Africa. This plan stipulated specific developmental areas for emphasis in order to accelerate the pace of integration of women in development in the Africa Region. Among these strategies were the establishment of organizational and administrative structures charged with the responsibility for promoting and co-ordinating action for the benefit of women; recognition and promotion of the role of women in agriculture and rural development; expansion of women's opportunities in such areas as education and training, employment, health, and public life; undertaking action-oriented research and data collection as well as devising relevant indicators to measure women's contribution to socio-economic development of their countries; utilization of the mass media as an instrument for positive change, development, and promotion of women's position in African societies; and taking legislative and administrative measures towards advancing the position of women in individual countries. All these African strategies were embodied in the World Plan of Action and were included in the minimum objectives of the Decade recommended for achievement by 1980. In effect, the implementation of the Africa Plan of Action implies the realizations of the World Plan of Action and the goals of the United Nations Decade for Women is so far as it applies to African countries.

The Decade is soon coming to a close. It is time for African countries to take stock of what impact, direct or indirect, the Decade has made on their development, particularly on the extent to which it has contributed to the acceleration of the integration of African women, as contributors to and beneficiaries in Africa's development. General Assembly Resolution 3520(XXX) of 15 December 1975 on the 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year called upon Governments to take appropriate action to implement the World Plan of Action including:

a) The establishment of short-term, medium-term, and long-term targets and priorities to this end;

b) The adoption of national strategies, plans, and programmes for the implementation of the recommendations within the framework of the overall development plans, policies and programmes;

c) The undertaking of regular reviews and appraisals of progress made at the national and local levels in achieving the goals and objectives of the World Plan of Action within the framework of the overall development plans, policies and programmes.

To this end, the Review and Appraisal of the United Nations Decade for Women in the Africa Region is being undertaken by ECA, with the assistance of competent consultants from the Region. It is being carried out at three levels. The first level consists of an extensive examination of relevant documents in the various socio-economic development sectors at the Headquarters of ECA and in selected member States: Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Zambia. These countries have been chosen on the basis of geographical distribution and lingustic balance. Secondly, the review will involve discussions, interviews, and consultations with national leaders, planners, policy makers, including leaders of national machineries for women, as well as representatives of women beneficiaries of activities undertaken during the Decade, at the high, middle and grassroot levels, to assess the impact of the Decade at various levels. Thirdly, it will involve field assessment of some of the programmes and projects which have been implemented during and as a result of the Decade.

In addition, it will include an examination of obstacles and constraints that have impeded progress in women's equal participation in the development of African countries. Some of these obstacles may apply generally to the development process in African countries. Others, however, may stem from historical and socio-cultural practices discriminatory against women. It is expected that concrete proposals will result from this exercise, for future action and measures necessary to achieve the objectives and goals of the Decade even after the close of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace.

As the United Nations Decade for Women was under implementation, African countries were, at the same time, experiencing difficult economic conditions brought about by both external and internal factors. New development emphases were emerging, making it imperative for African countries to re-orient their development strategies and priorities. The Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa (LPA) came at the mid-point of the United Nations Decade for Women. It rose out of the need for African countries to adopt a strategy best suited to their own situations, having realized that previous development concepts and approaches had not brought any significant improvement in the quality of life for the people of Africa. The plan puts emphasis on rapid achievements of increased measures of self-sufficiency and self-reliance; economic integration and co-operation among African countries; establishment and support of national, subregional, and regional institutions to facilitate the attainment of self-sufficiency

and self-reliance. Among the sectors stipulated by the Plan for emphasis include increased food production to enable African countries to feed themselves; the development of industries, natural resources, trade, transport and communication, full development and effective utilization of human resources, building up an adequate scientific and technological base and ensuring its appropriate transfer and application to all areas of development. Women, as contributors to and beneficiaries of Africa's development efforts, are an important element in the implementation and achievements of the goals of the LPA. The Plan itself points out the "importance of giving special attention to women" in the analysis of the present situation and in proposing measures to bring about the achievements of the LPA. The review of the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women cannot therefore be isolated from the principles laid down in the LPA. To do so would be to isolate women from the mainstream of Africa's development strategies.

Analysis of the achievement of the first half of the Decade for Women indicated that although some notable efforts had been made by some governments in promoting the advancement of women in development, accelerated action was still needed to bring about the desired quantitative and qualitative improvement in the situation for women. A number of obstacles impeding the advancement of women remained yet to be overcome. To this end, the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women; Equality, Development and Peace, held in Copenhagen, in 1980 drew up a Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women, Equality, Development and Peace. The Lagos Plan of Action has coincided with the Programme of Action, and the review and appraisal of the United Nations Decade must take this factor into account.

Following the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), developing nations adopted Technical Co-operation Among Developing Countries (TCDC), as a co-operative strategy to achieve faster and more balanced development among developing countries. The Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN), the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade and the Industrial Development Decade are among the alternative development strategies calling for a reconsideration and modification of approaches and the adoption of new ones to bring about accelerated socio-economic growth and development. All these had tremendous impact on women's participation in development efforts in African countries during the Decade. The review and appraisal of the achievements and obstacles of the United Nations Decade for Women must of necessity therefore be viewed in this context.

The results of this review at the Africa level, will be submitted as one of the major papers to the Africa Regional Inter-governmental Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women, scheduled for September 1984 and the final proposals and recommendations from the Regional Conference will constitute a major input into the World Conference to be held in Nairobi in 1985.